

I better get out of here, I say,
I haven't done any work
today.

here, let me comb your
hair. going to take me to the harness
races tonight?

they don't run until
September.

o. well, let's have a baby then.
a little Charles. wouldn't that be sweet,
running about?

I suppose. listen, I'll be back tonight,
9:30 o.k.?

o.k. look, that red spider gets closer and
closer...

don't worry, if he's male you won't have any
trouble.

don't forget, she says, to clean your teeth with
dental floss or you're going to lose the rest
of them.

sure, I say,
9:30.

55 beds in the same direction

these brilliant midnights
gabardine snakes passing through
walls, sounds
broken by car crashes of drunks in
ten year old cars

you know it's soiled again and then
again

it's in these brilliant midnights
while fighting moths and tiny
mosquitoes,
your woman behind you
twisting in the blankets
thinking you no longer love her;
that's untrue, of course,
but the walls are familiar and

I've liked walls
I've praised walls:
give me a wall and I'll give you a way --
that's all I asked in
exchange. but I suppose I meant:
I'll give you my
way.

it's very difficult to compose a
sonnet while sleeping in a flophouse with
55 snoring men
in 55 beds all pointed in the same direction.

I'll tell you what I thought:
these men have lost both chance and
imagination.

you can tell as much about men in the
way they snore as in the way they
walk, but then
I was never much at sonnets.

but once I thought I'd find all great men on
skid row
I once thought I'd find great men down there
strong men who had discarded society,
instead I found men who society had fiddled
away.

they were dull
inept and
still
ambitious.

I found the bosses more
interesting and more alive than the
slaves.

and that was hardly romantic. one would like things
romantic.

55 beds pointed in the same
direction and
I couldn't sleep
my back hurt
and there was a steady feeling on my
forehead like a piece of
sheet metal.

it really wasn't very terrible but somehow
it was very impossible.

and I thought,
all these bodies and all these toes and all
these fingernails and all these hairs in
assholes and all this stink

immaculate and accepted mauling of
things,
can't we do something with it?

no chance, came the answer, they don't
want it.

then, looking all about
all those 55 beds pointed in the same
direction
I thought
all these men were babies once
all these men were cuddly and
pink (except the black ones and the yellow ones
and the red ones and the others).

they cried and they felt,
had a way.

now they've become
sophisticated
phlegmatic
unwants.

I got
out.

I got between 4 walls
alone.

I gave myself a brilliant
midnight. other brilliant midnights
arrived. it wasn't that
difficult.

but if they had been there:
(those men) I would have stayed there with
them.

if I can save you the same years of error
let me:

the secret is in the walls
listening to a small radio
rolling cigarettes
drinking

coffee
beer
water
grape juice

a lamp burning near you
it comes along --
the names
the history
a flow a flow
the downward glance of psyche
the humming effect
the burning of monkeys

the brilliant midnight walls:
there's no stopping even as your head rolls
under the bed and the cat buries
its excreta.

well, now that Ezra has died...

well, now that Ezra has died
we are going to have a great many poems written
about Ezra and what he meant and who he
was and how it went
and how it still is with
Ezra gone.

well, I was shackled with this alcoholic woman
for 7 years
and I kept packing home the CANTOS through the
door, and she kept saying,
"For God's sake, you got POUND again? You know
you can't read him. Did you bring any
wine?"

she was right. I couldn't read the CANTOS.
but I usually brought the wine
and we drank the
wine.

I don't know how many years I packed those
CANTOS back and forth from the downtown public
library
but they were always available in the shelves of
the Literature and Philology section.

well, he died, and I finally went from wine to
beer and now he's died,
I suppose he was a great writer
it's just that I'm so lazy in my reading habits,
I detest any sort of immaculate strain,
but I still feel rather warm for him and Ernie
and Gertie and James J., all that gang
gripping to world war one
making the 20's and 30's available
in their special way; then there was world war 2,
Ezra backed a loser and got 13 years in with the
loonies, and now he's dead at 87 and his mistress is
alone.